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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2007

In Today's Papers

Controversy over the Draft Constitution

All papers: The University Rectors committee convened yesterday to evaluate the new constitution draft. At the end of the one-hour meeting, the Chairman of The Board of Higher Education (YOK) Prof. Erdogan Tezic made a strong statement saying that "a clause that would lead use of headscarf in universities is not legally possible.

The ban on the headscarf is a legal situation created by decisions of the Supreme Court and European Court of Human Rights, and that it cannot be regulated in by the constitution." Tezic also urged the government to suspend work on the new draft until after the October 21 referendum so that the unclear situation regarding the election of the President would be resolved. Meanwhile, Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya released an unexpected written statement saying that the lifting of the headscarf ban would trigger hatred, will damage trust in law, and would lead to turmoil and polarization in the Turkish public. Moreover, it would create the impression that the government has a tendency toward oligarchy. Following the warnings of the university rectors and of the Chief Prosecutor, PM Erdogan, during the press conference to brief the public on the draft constitution, urged the rectors to "mind their own business" and said that "the job of legislation belongs to the parliament. The committee of rectors is not authorized to make a decision about the constitutional reforms planned by the government."

Papers also report that while PM Erdogan expressing his disappointment that the Turkish press has reduced the debate over the draft to the headscarf issue, he told the Financial Times that the main goal of his government is to lift the headscarf ban from the universities.

Under Secretary Nicholas Burns Visits Turkey

All papers report visiting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns met Wednesday with Prime Minister Erdogan. Burns told the press after the meeting that he explained to the

prime minister that the US is pursuing a "diplomatic and peaceful strategy regarding Iran." "The best thing for us to do is work with Turkey and other countries like Russia and China to convince Iran through diplomatic means. In that regard, we will need support from Asia, the Middle East and European countries to contribute to the sanctions on Iran," Burns stressed. When reminded of Turkey's complaints with regard to US weapons ending up in the hands of the outlawed PKK in northern Iraq, Burns assured that the US was "solidly with Turkey," denying extension of arms or backing to the PKK. "The US would like to continue working with the Iraqi and Turkish governments in order to give an end to the horrible actions of the PKK. The PKK deserves universal condemnation," Burns said. Burns also noted Secretary Rice was expected to come to Istanbul for a meeting of Iraq's neighbors at the end of October. Following talks with Erdogan, Burns was received by President Abdullah Gul and held talks with Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) officials later in the day.

Editorial Commentary on Nicholas Burns' Turkey Visit

Semih Idiz commented in the mainstream daily Milliyet:

"International relations function on eternal benefits, not based on eternal hostility or eternal friendship. In this context, the US seems determined to restore ties with Turkey and move toward a constructive and solid ground. The visit of U/S Burns to Turkey is part of this effort. His remarks at the Atlantic Council prior to his visit indicated that Washington has left behind its pre-Iraqi occupation proud and overly-confident attitude, and is now ready to pursue a rather realistic and modest attitude. Regarding the future of Iraq, Washington is now relying more on its bilateral relations with Turkey. Deterioration of bilateral ties with Washington does not bring any benefit to Ankara either. Official circles, the Foreign Ministry included, are emphasizing that Turkey should be in a close working relationship with Washington to solve serious

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problems, such as the PKK. PM Erdogan hopes that his upcoming trip to Washington will contribute to these efforts as Burns leaves Turkey with an understanding of the importance of the PKK issue. Bilateral ties are moving in this direction unless poisoned suddenly by an Armenian resolution in the US Congress."

Soli Ozel wrote in the mainstream daily Sabah: "The speech by U/S Burns set the tone for his trip which demonstrated that Washington wants to see Turkey on its side as part of a long term strategy. Burns' speech at the Atlantic Council gave enough clues regarding the policy. Moreover Burns has three concrete demands from Turkey: the US wants Turkey not to pursue the energy deal with Iran and move closer to the US policy instead; the US wants Turkey to open border with Armenia; and the US wants Turkey to lift its veto against Greek Cypriots on NATO-EU security cooperation. The problem is that Burns does not offer anything for Turkey while he makes very clear demands. His words on the fight against the PKK and its presence in Northern Iraq are insufficient."

Asli Aydintasbas writes in Sabah: "With this visit, U/S Burns gave Washington's message to the ruling AKP: 'let's start all over.' Following his visit there will be a continuation of high level contacts both in Ankara and in Washington, which clearly indicates that both sides are very enthusiastic about strong Turkish-American ties. However, there are some minuses in the bilateral relations along with the pluses. The most notable minus is the lack of prevention of PKK attacks. There is no concrete action regarding the PKK so far. There is no way for the US to restore its unfavorable image in Turkey as long as the current situation on the PKK continues as is. Along with other potential problems, such as an Armenian Genocide Resolution in the Congress, Iraq seems to be the most critical issue between the two countries. The US will start a reduction of troops as of 2008 and move its presence to Northern Iraq. Ankara does not want a US military force there. The question is how Ankara and Washington will sort this out. It seems the year 2008 will be a giant period for bargaining between the two countries."

Hayrettin Karaman argued in the Islamist-leaning daily Yeni Safak: "According to press reports, U/S Burns has something concrete in his hands: He is here to ask for support for US policies on Iran and the

Middle East while he will, in exchange for Turkey's support, offer America's help in eliminating the PKK in Northern Iraq. This is nothing but an indecent proposal. Does a friend call the PKK a terrorist organization and impose some demands before eliminating that terrorist threat? This clearly says 'we are going to strike Iran and establish a new order in the Middle East to better serve Israeli interests. We will continue to support the PKK indirectly unless Turkey supports and contributes to our plan.' All of this is anything but friendship."

Ankara Garrison Commandant Protests the First Lady

Vatan, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, Radikal and others: At a ceremony held yesterday at Ankara's Esenboga airport to welcome President Gul on his return from Northern Cyprus, Ankara Garrison Commander General Aslan Guner, to avoid shaking hand with Mrs. Gul, left his place in the welcoming line.

Diaspora Obstacle to Armenian Patriarch Mutafyan in US
Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Vatan and others: Washington's Georgetown-University canceled a scheduled speech by the Patriarch of Turkish Armenians, Mesrob II Mutafyan, after pressure from the Armenian lobby.

Turks Injured by Americans in Iraq Sue US Ankara Embassy
Mainstream Hurriyet reports Hamit Ozkaya and Mehmet Nezir Ekdi, two Turkish truck drivers carrying construction equipment to the airport built by Americans in Tikrit, were heavily injured by friendly fire from an approaching US convoy near Beji on December 11, 2006. The Turks were airlifted to a military hospital by Americans, and one of

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the injured, Hamit Ozkaya, the father of 10 children, had to have his leg amputated. The two Turks later filed a court case against the American soldiers in Silopi in Urfa province, but the court rejected the application saying only a UN court can investigate crimes against civilians in war zones. Ozkaya and Ekdi now have applied to a court in Ankara, this time suing the US Embassy and asking for 700,000 Turkish Lira in compensation.

TV Highlights
NTV

Domestic News

- President Gul and of the Turkish General Staff Chief General Yasar Buyukanit yesterday attended the funeral of the cousin of Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, a soldier killed in fighting with PKK terrorists in the southeastern province of Bitlis.

- Five PKK militants and one Turkish security official were killed in clashes with a group of around 30 terrorists in Sirnak province on the Iraqi border.

- President Gul said political equality was a main parameter for a settlement in Cyprus.

- A high-speed 3G mobile phone license awarded to Turkish operator Turkcell last week has been cancelled due to a lack of competition. Last Friday, Turkcell, the sole bidder for third-generation licenses, won one license for 321 million Euro. Three other tenders were cancelled. Preparations are under way for a new tender.

International News

- On Wednesday, a car bomb killed anti-Syrian Lebanese lawmaker Antoine Ghanem and at least six other people in Beirut, less than a week before parliament's election of a new president. Syria's opponents believe Damascus is behind the killing.

- The US Embassy in Baghdad has barred its officials from traveling by land outside the Green Zone as Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki suggested the US Embassy stop using American security firm Blackwater.

- The European Union confirmed Belgian EU official Gilles de Kerchove as the bloc's new anti-terror coordinator on Wednesday, six

months after the post became vacant.

- A court in Moscow has banned the Russian translations of 14 books by Said-i Nursi, an Islamic thinker of Kurdish origin from Turkey. The court ruling said the books fuelled religious tensions and had signs of extremism.

WILSON